HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS
Hugvísindasvið

The Wish to Marry and Its Consequences

On Hierarchies in the Eddic Poems Skírnismál, Alvíssmál, *and* Þrymskviða

Ritgerð til MA-prófs í víkinga- og miðaldafræðum

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Ágrip

Vensl á borð við hjónabönd eru algengt minni í norrænum bókmenntum. Í eddukvæðunum *Skírnismálum*, *Alvíssmálum* og *Þrymskviðu* er einnig fengist við giftingarhugleiðingar og afleiðingar þeirra. Þó að fjölbreyttar ástæður séu að baki við óskum um hjónabönd eru margir þættir sem einkenna þau í þessum goðsögulegu frásögnum. Þar sem goðsagnir hvers samfélags eru oft eins konar skuggsjá af félagslegum viðmiðum og mynstrum í því, þá eru hinar norrænu frásagnir um *æsi*, *vani* og *jötna* mikilvægar til að veita innsýn í raunveruleika íslensks miðaldasamfélags.

Út frá þeirri forsendu má bera goðsagnalegu frásagnirnar saman við varðveitt lög frá þjóðveldistímanum til að varpa nýju ljósi á virkni goðsagnaheims og raunheims norrænna manna. Í þessari rannsókn er sjónum einkum beint að stigveldunum sem tengjast hjúskaparlögum (milli guða og annarra goðsagnavera, karla og kvenna, feðra og dætra) og koma í ljós í rannsókninni og enn fremur hvernig þeim er haldið við og þau varin.

Abstract

Alliances such as marriage are a recurring topic within the Old Norse literary corpus. The three Eddic poems *Skírnismál, Alvíssmál,* and *Þrymskviða* also address the wish to marry, as well as its consequences. Although the reasons for entering the bonds of marriage may vary widely, common elements that characterise a conjugal union can be established in these mythological accounts. And because any given society's myths are often found to mirror its social norms and patterns, the Old Norse narratives of *æsir*, *vanir*, and giants are thought to provide some insight into the reality of the medieval Icelandic society.

Based on this assumption, a comparison of the mythological recordings with the transmitted laws from the Icelandic Free State period (ca. 930-1262/64) can shed new light on the mechanics of both the mythological and the factual worlds of Old Norse society. This study will focus on the hierarchies associated with marriage regulations (between the gods and other mythological beings, males and females, fathers and daughters) that may emerge from this analysis, as well as the ways in which these are maintained and protected.

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1. Introduction

Eg mun bregða
því að eg brúðar á
fleǫt um ráð sem faðir,
vark-a eg heima
þá er þér heitið var,
að sá einn er gjöfer með goðum.[1]

Þórr directs these strong and distinct words as in response to the dwarf *Alvíss* who affianced with the god's daughter in his absence and now wants to take his future wife home. Although this stanza is only one segment of Eddic poetry revolving around matrimony, it provides a clear insight into the set of rules mythological beings play by: a marriage is not deemed valid without the consent of the bride's father.

Marriage and similar sexual alliances between women and men are constantly recurring motifs in literature. As the lines from *Alvíssmál* show, this matter is also addressed in the medieval compilation of Eddic poems – both the mythological and the heroic lays – as well as in Snorri Sturlusons's *Edda* and the Old Norse sagas. Although the descriptions may differ from source to source in regards to their emphasis (which can for instance be the courtship or the wedding ceremony itself), they all create a strong picture of the imagined mythological world and provide, at least to some extent, information about medieval Icelandic society. Matrimony reflects a wide range of social regulations and boundaries by which the Old Norse gods and other mythological beings had to comply with but are also expressed through other events. It is, indeed, no sheer coincidence that *Þórr* battles in many stories giants or other 'evildoers' to divert imminent danger from the worlds of the gods and humans. *Þórr*'s actions are his contribution to sustaining the existing social standards and given conditions within the mythological world. Here it is the *æsir* who lead the social hierarchy and make the rules to retain this advantageous state.

The culture of writing arrived in Iceland together with Christianity which has been officially accepted in 999/1000. It is therefore safe to assume that Christian scribes recorded the stories of the pre-Christian gods for a Christian audience, and that their writing was influenced by their new faith. And yet, the Christian scribes dealt with the

[1] *Alv* 4, Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason, ed., *Eddukvæði 1, Goðakvæði* (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenzka Fornritfélag, 2014), 438.

beliefs of a bygone time in the twelfth century, while the narratives that they were dealing with may have had their origin in the eighth or ninth century.

In medieval Iceland personal bonds were of great importance since they characterised the social order. This was also reflected in matrimony, which was only on rare occasions entered into due to pure love. Whatever promoted marriage, it happened according to certain rules and social standards and was often conducted on behalf of the interests of a family as opposed to merely love or even romance.[2]

As a similar impression is created in the mythological poems, it seems pertinent to take a closer look at these literary accounts and compare them with sources about the medieval Icelandic society.

The aim of this thesis is to investigate the significance of the pre-Christian marriage myths as they pertain to the subsequent Christian society in Iceland by focussing on the relationship between female and male mythological figures as well as the accepted behaviour patterns within that society. Within this frame, the following questions will be approached:

What is a myth, and what function did the pre-Christian marriage myths have for the Icelandic people in the thirteenth century? To what extent are the delineated social order and the constituted behaviour of the gods applicable to thirteenth-century Icelandic society? How and why were females bent to males' will to marry them? And finally, could females assert their wish to marry, and on what terms could that happen?

To answer these questions, the three mythological poems *Skírnismál*, *Alvíssmál* and *Þrymskviða* will be examined regarding their depicted marriage myth elements. To begin with, the state of research on matrimony and the role of women in that alliance, as well as the three poems, are provided. Then the approach and the concept of myth will be outlined. The textual analyses of the three Eddic poems *Skírnismál*, *Alvíssmál*, and *Þrymskviða* are preceded by reflections on the Old Norse mythological world as well as on matrimony in medieval Iceland. The considerations on marriage are based on the legal codex *Grágás* and are revisited in the surveys of the poems. Finally the conclusion of this examinations and further prospects are proposed.

[2] Jenny Jochens, *Women in Old Norse Society* (Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 1995), 31; see also Bjørn Bandlien, *Strategies of Passion: Love and Marriage in Medieval Iceland and Norway*, trans. Betsy van der Hoek (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), 4.

2. Approach, Theory and Sources

2.1 Approach

As this work discusses the Old Norse myths on marriage with an emphasis on the role of women, it seems particularly apt to apply a feministic approach on the textual corpus. In her monograph *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction* (1978) the literary scholar Judith Fetterly criticises that female readers are supposed to identify with the male perspective and that they have to accept this as a conventional and justified fact.[3] According to Fetterley it is only possible to change that perception by renouncing oneself from being an agreeing reader, and turn into a so-called *resisting reader* who is detached from established male ideologies that are integrated in our mind-set and, as such, present in the written text. The *resisting reader* should instead read a text 'against itself'.[4]

Another useful approach has been coined by Pierre Marcherey, who introduced the idea of gaps and silences of a text. The French critic argues that these textual omissions express the underlying ideology on which the text is created, and simultaneously signify what is forbidden from being said.[5] Because Helga Kress holds a similar view in her article *Taming the Shrew: The Rise of Patriarchy and the Subordination of the Feminine in Old Norse Literature* (2002), it seems most fruitful to combine the idea of gaps and silences with a comparative approach in order to accentuate the functionality of the Old Norse marriage myth(s) for medieval Christian Icelandic society.

2.2 Theory – Concept of Myth and Its Tradition

To investigate the meaning and functionality of Old Norse marriage myths for the subsequent Icelandic society in this work, a definition of the concept "myth" should first be approached. The term "myth" derives from the Old Greek word *μῦθος* (*mýthos*) and is a narrative in poetic or prosaic form that creates a reference between This World and The Other World. The described events usually take place in The Other World and in a distant time or even beyond time. The main actors in myths are gods and other supernatural beings as well as humans, and their existence is unquestionable for the particular (human)

[3] Judith Fetterley, *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), xx.
[4] Ibid., xxi-xxii.
[5] Terry Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 16.

society. Myths have an impact on the entity of the related society's world view and how it is structured**,** but are not entitled to make claims of truth.[6] They have to legitimise the establishment of social institutions as well as associated norms, such as the hierarchy among the Old Norse gods and giants. Moreover, people use myths as a tool to explain the environment they live in (i.e., natural phenomena), and to express their self-conception as a group. These narratives also have to deal with everyday life to preserve their meaning.[7]

The Egyptologist Jan Assmann goes a step further with his definition considering myth as a connection to the past and thus a form of remembering that is maintained through generations. How this form of memory is organised, and how long knowledge is kept depends, according to Assmann, on social and cultural parameters. In other words myths are of a dynamic character but adapt to cultural needs and are thereby altered.[8] Both Jan Assmann and Kirsten Hastrup point out that a transition of myth(s) takes place when the former orally transmitted narratives pass into writing. Preliterate societies store their memories in events, and beyond that use human memory as a medium or carrier; for this reason a distinct limitation of recollection can be observed. When writing was finally introduced, an improvement emerged as script enables one to transfer, store and recall memory. It allows one to sustain memory beyond the limits of an epoch or generation, as it is able to bear more than human memory could ever remember.[9]

At the same time texts in the Middle Ages were of a different nature than today. In those times a text was not fixed or stable but rather changeable and could be adapted to the prevailing circumstances. When society changed, texts that approached social norms

[6] The historian of religion Jens Peter Schjødt distinguishes *This World*, by which he means our human world, from *The Other World*, the world of the gods and other mythological and heroic beings. Jens Peter Schjødt, *Initiation Between Two Worlds: Structure and Symbolism in Pre-Christian Scandinavian Religion* (Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2008) 65; see also Catharina Raudvere, "The Power of the Spoken Word as Literary Motif and Ritual Practice in Old Norse Literature," *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 1 (2005): 190.

[7] Ármann Jakobsson, "Enter the Dragon: Legendary Saga Courage and the birth of the Hero," in *Making History: Essays on the Fornaldarsögur*, ed. Martin Arnold and Alison Finlay (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2010), 36.

[8] Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis – Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (München: C. H. Beck, 2007), 78.

[9] Ibid., 23; see also Kirsten Hastrup, "Presenting the Past – Reflections on Myth and History," *Folk* 29 (1987): 265.

or intellectual concerns had to follow suit to maintain their meaning and comprehensibility.[10]

The same rules applied to myths. Without adapting to new social conditions, these narratives had lost their meaning and probably faded into obscurity.[11]

The most important accounts dealing with Old Norse mythology are the two *Edda*s, the *Poetic Edda* and *Snorra Edda*. Although these written sources provide a very comprehensive insight into the collection of narratives, the greater part of these narratives have probably been lost over the course of centuries.[12] Both these virtual sanctuaries are only the tip of the iceberg whose remaining mass will unfortunately stay inaccessible.

The *Poetic Edda* is a compilation of ten mythological and nineteen heroic poems which are of anonymous Icelandic origin. The manuscript *Codex Regius* (Gks 2365, 4to) serves as the basis for most editions and was compiled around 1270. Smaller collections of poems might have predated this extensive compilation and were presumably put into writing in the early thirteenth century.[13] A second but only fragmentarily preserved manuscript originating from the early fourteenth century (AM 748, 4to) contains six mythological poems in total as well as the heroic lay *Vǫlundarkviða*.

The metres in which the Eddic poems are composed are *fornyrðislag* ("old lore metre"), *ljóðaháttr* ("metre of the chant") and *galdralag* ("metre of the charm"). *Fornyrðislag* occurs in the narrative poems of the *Poetic Edda* as well as on the Rök rune stone from the early ninth century.[14] *Ljóðaháttr* is the metre that is often used within wisdom poetry but also occurs in dialogical poems. *Galdralag* is employed in stanzas of a magical or cursing nature.[15]

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[10] Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, *Kapitler af Nordens Litteratur i Oldtid og Middelalder* (Aarhus: Aarhus Universitetsforlag, 2006), 18/19.
[11] Hastrup, "Presenting the Past," 260.
[12] It is still unclear where the name *Edda* derives from. One suggestion is the derivation from the Old Norse word *edda* 'great-grandmother'. Another idea is that the word originates in the Latin word *edo* (infinitive *ēdere*) 'I say, I utter [poetry]'. A combination of both is also conceivable which is to be understood as 'great-grandmother of poetry compendia'. Paul Acker, "Introduction – Edda 2000," in *The Poetic Edda – Essays on Old Norse Mythology*, ed. Paul Acker and Carolyne Larrington (New York and London: Routledge, 2002)," xiii.
[13] These smaller collections are lost. Terry Gunnell, *The Origins of Drama in Scandinavia* (Cambridge/ Rochester, New York: Brewer/ Boydel & Brewer, 1995), 184. In the 1640s the *Codex Regius* entered into possession of the Icelandic bishop Brynjólfur Sveinsson. He sent the manuscript in 1662 as a present to the Danish king Frederik III, and the manuscript remained in Copenhagen until 1971 when it finally returned to Iceland. Meulengracht Sørensen, *Kapitler af Nordens Litteratur*, 62/63.
[14] Rudolf Simek and Hermann Pálsson *"Lexikon der Altnordischen Literatur,"* (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1987) 99/100.
[15] Ibid., 105; 250/251.

Although the metres can be traced back to the pre-Christian times, the dating of the poems themselves is rather difficult. Some stanzas, admittedly even whole poems, are quoted in other written accounts that are of an earlier origin than the Codex Regius. And yet, it is strictly the manuscripts that can be dated while the poems' age will remain untold.[16] Terry Gunnell summarises this difficulty: *"In short, the manuscripts' versions reflect the state of the poems as they existed in the oral tradition in the mid-twelfth century, at the very earliest."*[17]

The poems of the *Poetic Edda* served as sources for the mythological narratives told by Snorri Sturlson as well as Saxo Grammaticus.[18] Snorri Sturluson compiled his *Edda* (*Snorra Edda*) presumably as a handbook for skalds. As it also provides a multitude of prose narratives about the gods' deeds, it is an essential tool to understand and work with the Eddic poems. *Snorra Edda* is not a homogenous work, however, and therefore must be treated with caution. Quite a few examples from it are stated within this thesis as they are necessary to understand correlations and social fabrics. It is also pertinent to point out that both the structure of the mythological world and the social hierarchy among supernatural beings are mainly based on the information provided by *Snorra Edda.*

Referring to the medieval Icelandic norms and regulations, examples from the compilation *Grágás* are employed. *Grágás* is not a coherent body of laws of Iceland's Free State period (930-1262/64) but rather a collective term for laws from different times and manuscripts.[19] The two main codices are *Kónungsbók* (Gks 1157 fol., ca. 1260) and *Staðarhólsbók* (AM 334 fol., ca. 1280).

In this thesis the Old Norse quotes are taken from the following editions:

- *Eddukvæði 1, Goðakvæði.* Edited by Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason. Reykjavík: Hið Íslenzka Fornritfélag, 2014.[20]

[16] Meulengracht Sørensen, *Kapitler af Nordens Litteratur*, 66.
[17] Terry Gunnell, *The Origins of Drama*, 184.
[18] Saxo Grammaticus (ca. 1150-1220) was a Danish chronicler and historian. He recorded in 16 books the history of Denmark. This work is called *Gesta Danorum* and the books 1-9 deal with the Old Norse mythology. For further readings see Karsten Friis-Jensen, ed., *Saxo Grammaticus – A Medieval Author Between Norse and Latin Culture* (København: Museum Tusculanum, 1981).
[19] Not all preserved laws were valid at the same time, and a part of those laws was probably never valid. Andrew Dennis, Peter Foote and Richard Perkins, trans., *Laws of Early Iceland – Grágás: The Codex Regius of Grágás with Material from other Manuscripts* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1980) 9/10.
[20] This is the most recent edition of the Eddic poems in Old Norse. Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason provide a detailed commentary for each verse and apply the standardised spelling in Old Norse that occurs

- *Grágás – Lagasafn íslenska þjóðveldisins*. Edited by Gunnar Karlsson, Kristján Sveinsson and Mörður Árnarson. Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 1992.
- *Snorri Sturluson – Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*. Edited by Anthony Faulkes. London: Viking Society for Northern Research University College London, 2005.
- *Snorri Sturluson – Edda: Skáldskaparmál 1*. Edited by Anthony Faulkes. London: Viking Society for Northern Research University College London, 1998.

The research history on matrimony and women's studies in medieval Iceland (and Norway) is of a wide scope. A multitude of monographs and articles have been published during the last decades and the topic is far from exhausted. Jenny Jochens made history with her two monographs *Old Norse Images of Women* (1996) and *Women in Old Norse Society* (1995), a great contribution to the field of women's studies in the medieval north. The first of the two works deals with the different mythological and human images of women as they are preserved in poetic and prose written accounts - both Old Norse and Latin sources - from the medieval period. Here Jochens emphasises underlying conceptions of women as well as their role within the described society.

The latter, *Women in Old Norse Society*, however, discusses the lives of women in Norway and Iceland with respect to their portrayal in the *Islendingasǫgur*, *konungasǫgur*, and contemporary laws. Both monographs address the marriage topic and provide extensive insight for this study.

Turning to the Eddic poem *Skírnismál*, Magnus Olsen published the article *Fra gammelnorsk myte og kultus* (1909) in which he argued that the described events represent a *hieros gamos* in form of a myth of vegetation. According to Olsen, the fertility god *Freyr* wants to marry *Gerðr*, who embodies the earth goddess, but is unable to wake her up, and thus sends *Skírnir*, the personification of the sunbeam, in his place. When *Gerðr* finally wakes up, she and *Freyr* enter into matrimony, a divine connection that Olsen considers as a sacred marriage, a so-called *hieros gamos*.[21]

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also in other editions of Hið Íslenzka Fornritfélag. Beyond that, the edition discusses the poems' age and the topic they relate to. Other standard editions are Gustav Neckel's *Edda: Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern* (1962) and Ursula Dronke's *The Poetic Edda* I-III (1969/2011). Dronke's editions, however, are incomplete, and thus less practical for this thesis as *Alvíssmál* and *Þrymskviða* are not contained.

[21] As studies on *Alvíssmál* and *Þrymskviða* focus on other topics like the emerging/used language, raised questions or the cross dressing as such, at this place a closer examination is not stated. For further readings on *Alvíssmál* see Hans Klingenberg, "Alvíssmál: Das Lied vom überweisen Zwerg," *Germanisch-*

In "*What does woman want?" Mær and munr in Skírnismál* (1992) Carolyne Larrington discusses the curse that is directed against *Gerðr* with a feministic approach. Larrington argues that *Skírnir*'s threats were the product of male imagination, and that, by implication, five of the female's wishes and desires could be identified. Helga Kress also addresses *Gerðr* in her article *Taming the Shrew: The Rise of Patriarchy and the Subordination of the Feminine in Old Norse Literature* (2002). Kress emphasises the violence that is applied to women to bend them according to male's will as well as the missing female voice in Old Norse literature.[22]

romanische Monatsschrift 48 (1967): 113-42, and Lennart Moberg. "The Languages of *Alvíssmál*," *Saga-Book of the Viking Society* 18 (1970-73): 299-323; on *Þrymskviða* see James Frankki, "Cross-Dressing in the Poetic Edda - Mic muno Æsir argan kalla," *Scandinavian Studies* 84, 4 (2012): 425-437, and Margaret Clunies Ross "Reading *Þrymskviða*," in *The Poetic Edda – Essays on Old Norse Mythology*, ed. Paul Acker and Carolyne Larrington (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 177-194.

[22] For further readings on *Skírnismál* see also Heinz Klingenberg, "Fǫr Skírnis: Brautwerbungsfahrt eines Werbungshelfers," *Alvíssmál* 6 (1996): 21-62.

3. Social Structures

3.1 The Mythological Society: An Attempt at Classification

According to written sources, a multitude of supernatural beings inhabit the Old Norse mythological world. Among these are gods and giants but also elves, humans and many other creatures. As in any other world a social structure or hierarchy can be observed. In line with Margaret Clunies Ross' monograph *Prolonged Echoes - Old Norse Myths in Medieval Northern Society* (1994), these indigenous inhabitants can be distinguished in various ways: as like and unlike groups, depending on to their spatial location and according to kinship and descent. From whichever perspective the reader clusters the supernatural beings, a favour for the gods and a negative attitude towards the giants can usually be observed. This most likely being a result of the fact that the mythological poems and narratives are written from the viewpoint of the gods whose interests are strongly linked to the intentions of the humans. The reader is therefore already biased and rather sympathetic towards the deeds of the *æsir* and *vanir* even though trickery, violence and theft may occur, or oaths breached.[23]

The first ranking of like and unlike creatures is determined by a divergence between the gods (both *æsir* and *vanir*) and the giants based on the supremacy of the giants through the *æsir* which creates a distinct hierarchy.[24] The second classification is built on the geographical organisation of the mythological world which according to *Snorra Edda* consists of *Miðgarðr* and *Utgarðr*. *Miðgarðr* is located in the centre of the world and inhabited by the gods, humans and elves. In *Utgarðr*, on the other hand, giants and dwarfs dwell.[25] This order is not surprising as the events are described from the point of view of gods, humans and elves which in this hierarchy are placed in the middle, the centre of the

[23] Margaret Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes: Old Norse Myths in Medieval Northern Society – Volume 1: The Myths* (Odense: Odense University Press, 1994), 49.
[24] By like and unlike creatures a distinction against the standard and 'the other' is meant. The standard or normative group features similarities with the people who created and shared the mythological stories while 'the other' implies (a) group(s) that is/are diverged from the normative group in terms of habits, abodes etc.
[25] The term *Utgarðr* emerges only in *Gylf* 39. The Eddic poems, however, mention only *Miðgarðr*. Ármann Jakobsson examines the dwelling places of giants in his article "Where Do the Giants Live?" and concludes that they literally live everywhere. As opposed to the gods who seem to live united in one place (*Miðgarðr*), the giants which are often associated with the evil or chaos are scattered to the four winds and thus, to be found at the shore, in the woods, or in the mountains. Ármann Jakobsson "Where Do the Giants Live?," *Arkiv För Nordisk Filologi* 121 (2006): 101-112.

world. The third arrangement Clunies Ross proposes is based on kinship and descent, and seems most useful within the scope of this work and is therefore more closely developed.

3.2 Kinship and Descent in the Mythological World

On account of *Gylfaginning* 5-6, the frost giants were the first inhabitants of the mythological world and thus the oldest supernatural beings. From them the *æsir* are the matrilineal descendants, as the brothers' (*Óðinn, Vili* and *Vé*) mother was the giantess *Bestla*. The origin of the gods' father *Borr*[26], however, is not precisely specified. This derivation and the consequently close kinship between *æsir* and giants is ascribed little importance. In fact, from the unbalanced significance of the matrilineage emanates the prevalent supremacy of the *æsir* over the giants in the sense of a social hierarchy. This social structure in turn legitimises the prohibition of marriages between *ásynjur* and giants,[27] and has its origin in the unequal valuation of male and female in the Old Norse mythological world which is further discussed in chapter 4.4.

These two social groups are not the only existing and ranked ones. With the *vanir*, another group of supernatural beings stands somehow between them. Even though the *vanir* have been incorporated into the group of *æsir*, they are not treated as equals, but are located on a lower level. When the *vanir* were integrated into the group of gods, they had to adapt to certain rules, among them the abandonment of incestuous relationships which used to be common among the *vanir*. Due to their lower social rank, the *vanir* are also forbidden to marry *ásynjur*. In order to fulfil the requirement of exogamous matrimony, they are, however, given the right to marry giantesses.

In *Marriage Exchange and Social Structure in Old Norse Mythology* (1991), Torben Anders Vestergaard refers to possible elementary kinship structures as generalised exchange, restricted exchange and a combination of both principles of exchange. Generalised exchange signifies the transfer of something from one group to another while the giver receives something from a third party. Restricted exchange, on the other hand, implies that one transfers something to another group and obtains something from the same group. As related to social groups this implies that in a society characterised by generalised exchange women of one group marry men of another group while men of the

[26] According to *Gylf* 6, *Borr* emerged when the cow *Auðhumla* licked the rime from the stones.
[27] Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes – The Myths*, 57.

first group receive wives from a third group. For a generalised exchange, at least three parties are necessary. In a society that is featured by restricted exchange, women are permanently 'traded' between two groups.[28] If these social groups were arranged to form a hierarchy, the social system would evoke hypogamy which signifies an upwards marriage of women. Hypergamy, on the other hand, implies a socially downward marriage of women. If the social system is solely restricted to hypogamy, and women are not allowed to marry into a social group that is ranked lower than their own, the circular flow is interrupted.[29]

The three social groups of *æsir*, *vanir* and giants are, as already mentioned, hierarchically structured, a condition that blocks the generalised exchange of women among the supernatural beings. Matrimony is allowed among giantesses and *vanir*, as well as among *æsir* and female *vanir*, but as there exists no higher ranked group than the *æsir*, the *ásynjur* are only able to marry within their social group. In order to maintain the dominance of the *æsir* over the *vanir* and the giants, they are only allowed to align themselves endogamously.[30]

The marriage between the giantess *Skaði* and the *vanr Njǫrðr* illustrates that an exchange of women between the individual social groups is possible. Since the *æsir* killed the giant *Þjazi*, his daughter *Skaði* demands to marry one of the gods, more precisely *Baldr*, as a compensation for her loss. The gods agree to her claim, but at the same time attach the condition that the giantess has to identify her future husband by his feet. *Skaði* 'fails' and chooses *Njǫrðr* instead of *Baldr*.[31] It seems safe to assume that the gods outwitted *Skaði* to prevent her from marrying an *áss* as this would have disturbed the dominant flow of women between the individual groups of supernatural beings.[32]

Another example for a hypogamous exchange is represented by the matrimony between the female *vanr Freyja* and the constantly travelling *áss Óðr*. *Freyja*'s only option is to marry into the group of *æsir* as she belongs to a social group that consists of her and her family members, her brother *Freyr* and their father *Njǫrðr*.[33]

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[28] Torben Anders Vestergaard, "Marriage Exchange and Social Structure in Old Norse Mythology," in Ross Samson ed., *Social Approaches to Viking Studies* (Glasgow: Cruithne Press, 1991), 24.
[29] Ibid., 26.
[30] Ibid., 30.
[31] *Skskm* 1.
[32] Verstergaard, "Marriage Exchange," 31.
[33] *Gylf* 35.

Even though it was against the rules of hypogamy, the giants attempt to steal the women of the gods. *Freyja* is often the giants' object of desire, as related in several mythological stories. The giant master builder in *Gylfaginning* 42, for instance, claims *Freyja*, the sun and the moon as reward for the construction of *Ásgarðr* in the predefined time period. Another example is described in the Eddic poem *Þrymskviða* in which the giant *Þrymr* steals *Þórr*'s hammer and conversely demands *Freyja* as his bride.[34] The giants, however, also lust after *ásynjur*, as it is described in *Skáldskaparmál* 1. In this chapter, it is the giant *Þjazi* who tries to 'steal' the goddess *Iðunn*.

The giants, as the group that ranks lowest in the social hierarchy, naturally desire women of the superior social groups, and do their utmost to outwit the gods in order to succeed in acquiring them. If the giants were fortunate with their attempts to win *ásynjur* or *Freyja* as their wives, they would contribute to the restoration of the all-embracing reciprocity and the associated denouement of the prevailing social hierarchy. Were the giants to succeed, the gods would lose their supremacy and would end up on an equal footing with the giants, a state of affairs that from the gods' point of view has to be avoided by whatever means necessary. As the examples have shown the giants do come close to succeeding on many occasions, but unfortunately for them, never quite achieve their goal.

The above described social structures and rules do not include all (supernatural) beings. Dwarfs and humans, for instance, have been left out so far. But how do they rank socially? From a purely literary angle, these types of beings are considered subgroups, as they occupy minor roles in the narratives about Old Norse mythology. Other than that, dwarfs and humans also differ from the older creatures in their origin: As it is told in *Gylfaginning* 14 as well as in *Vǫluspá* 9, the *æsir* were their creators. Another circumstance that seems relevant to classify humans and dwarfs into another group is that they are not sexually involved with the gods. With regard to dwarfs, this is based on the fact that their group is comprised of only males making them incapable of reproducing.[35] In regards to humans no further reasoning is given.[36]

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[34] A closer examination of the depicted marriage myth can be found in chapter 5.3.
[35] Anatoly Liberman, "What Happened to Female Dwarfs?," in *Mythological Women – Studies in Memory of Lotte Motz (1922-1997)*, ed. Rudolf Simek and Wilhelm Heizmann (Fassbaender: Wien, 2002), 260/261. A more detailed insight into the 'dwarf topic' provides chapter 6.2.
[36] Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes – The Myths*, 59; Clunies Ross suggests here that gods and humans *"are too much 'other' to allow the possibility of the development of kinship relationships between them."*.

3.4 FeMale: Single-sex Model or Not

As outlined above, females were 'traded' among the social groups of the *æsir*, *vanir*, and giants, and thus treated like objects or commodities. Both Clunies Ross and Vestergaard approach this circumstance in a structuralist and pragmatic way. Explanations for existing social roles and possibly underlying ideological deficiencies in terms of equality between females and males, however, seem to find little scholarly attention and even go virtually unnoticed. In fact, the impression is conveyed that the trade of women between fathers and future husbands was commonly accepted and justified in Old Norse mythology. In order to prove that this was likewise generally valid for the medieval Icelandic population, it seems essential to consider for a moment the saga genre as well as the underlying legislation of medieval Iceland.

Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir highlights that female characters are usually reduced to their outward appearance, primarily their bodies so to say, and according to their biological sex.[37] This recurring pattern is not only generic for patriarchal societies and elucidates the hierarchies between women and men but it also provides a socket for social structures: *"[A] woman's position, whatever her class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, or religion, is usually first and foremost determined by her relationship to her male kin."*[38] In this regard Jóhanna Katrín offers the example of differentiation of labour between women and men as it is well known from the Old Norse saga literature: women wear keys on their belt which signify females' authority over the household (*innan stokks*) while men are in charge of the world beyond that including agriculture, legislation, and travel, to name but a few. This standard classification, as Carol Clover addresses the binary division based on people's sex, is usually applied to the social order and constitutes the basis for an assumedly prevalent two-sex model in the Old Norse mythological, as well as the (actual) medieval Icelandic world. Clover, however, proposes to detach from this leading opinion of a two-sex model and suggests instead a single-sex model underlying these societies: Since this sex was the male sex, it was more beneficial for men than for women. In Clover's view, the two sexes distinguish themselves through their polarity. Even though femininity seemed likely to be associated to impuissance and masculinity

[37] This is certainly likewise applied to men. Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Women in Old Norse Literature – Bodies, Words and Power* (New York: Palgrave and Macmillan, 2013), 8.
[38] Ibid., 9.

was connected with sovereignty, these qualities were far from rigid. Rather, Clover argues, they were applicable to both females and males. If something like gender existed, Clover elaborates, it was *"'one gender', one standard by which persons were judged adequate or inadequate, and it was something like masculine."*[39] According to this understanding, females were not generally excluded from achieving a similar (if not the same) status or reputation than that which men could obtain.[40] However, even though Clover assumes that a superiority of the male over the female was not given,[41] the example she chose to illustrate women's rights or potential influence according to their marital status points towards the opposite:

> A woman's control over whatever property she might technically was less a function of her sex than her marital status: an unmarried and underage girl had none; a married woman, little; a widow, however, "could have charge of her own property, no matter her age, and administer of her children; she also had more say in arrangements that might be made for another marriage."[42]

As the underlying law does not equally differentiate between men, it exhibits a distinctively close tie between the biological sex, and the marital status, but only for women. Thus, a preference for the male sex is obvious and cannot be linked to the acquirement of personal attributes as Clover argues. A superior ranking of the male is also expressed in the earlier delineated exchange of women among the *æsir*, *vanir* and giants. Once again it is not the men who are exchanged nor is there even an alternating exchange. Instead, it is almost exclusively women who are 'traded' among the groups. The only exception that stresses a similar treatment of a male mythological being like that of a commodity is *Njǫrðr*, who is disposed of in marriage with the giantess *Skaði* instead of *Baldr*.

The following and last paragraph that is preliminary to the textual analyses of this thesis deals with the two most powerful attributes associated with women in Old Norse written accounts (especially within the saga corpus): voice or words and magic. Both of

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[39] Carol Clover, "Regardless of Sex: Men, Women, and Power in Early Northern Europe," *Representations* 44 (Autumns 1993): 13.
[40] Ibid., 4.
[41] Ibid., 13. Clover refers to Thomas W. Laqueur's one-sex-model based on the assumption that differences between women and men resulted from their social rather than their biological disparities. Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex – Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990). Clover's article addresses examples from the Old Norse saga literature and the Old Norse law texts but also makes references to the mythological narratives.
[42] Ibid., 4. Clover quotes here Foote, Peter and David M. Wilson. *The Viking Achievement – The Society and Culture of Early Medieval Scandinavia* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson 1970), 110.

these features could be deployed in various ways. While words for instance were used in the form of advice or incitement, magic was utilised against illnesses but also to prophesise or maintain peace.[43] A woman's voice or her words were her strongest and often only capability to enforce her demands or wishes. Of course, they were not only deployed for righteous reasons. That the male mythological characters were aware of these abilities, their influence, and power will be demonstrated in the following analyses of the three Eddic poems *Skírnismál*, *Alvíssmál* and *Þrymskviða*. [44] In reference to matrimony the prevalent discrepancy between females and males will be highlighted, especially as men tried to 'disarm' female characters or use women's 'weapons' against them to bend them to the male's will. By doing so they tried to maintain their supremacy over the other sex – be it based on an inequality resulting from a single- or two-sex model.

The next chapters approach matrimony in medieval Iceland mainly based on legal written accounts as well as three Eddic poems. The poems, as will be demonstrated, reflect similar if not identical behaviour patterns and rules in the mythological world and therefore, are considered as the mythological counterpart. For introductory matrimony and related arrangements are described, followed by the textual analyses of *Skírnismál*, *Alvíssmál*, and finally *Þrymskviða*.

[43] Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir discusses both features in her monograph *Women in Old Norse Literature* in reference to women's agency as it is depicted in literary accounts. As Jóhanna Katrín's contribution is mainly referring to the Icelandic saga literature (including *Íslendingasögur*, *samtíðarsögur*, *fornaldasögur*, *riddarasögur*) it is rather used to emphasise parallels and similarities within other literary genres that cannot be considered within the scope of this thesis.

[44] This applies also to saga characters as well as the medieval Icelandic society.

4. Matrimony in Medieval Iceland

"The German expression Kaufehe*, captures the essential feature of a woman's role and status in a pagan marriage, for it suggests the fundamental connection between marriage and property."*[45]

Before Iceland was subjugated by the Norwegian king in 1262/64, the country was characterised by a society that consisted of freeborn (*bændr*) and slaves (*þrællar*).[46] The social position of families was thus determined by its status and personal bonds towards other families. Medieval Iceland's social as well as political fabric were a sensitive construct, and feuds among farmers could lead to the loss of property and discredit a family's status. By sustaining a family's position within society, matrimony was an essential issue. Alliances created through marriage were rather meant to maintain a controlled transfer of property and to constitute or generate (new) allegiances. Such a connection with other powerful families could strengthen a family's political influence and support peace between individual households.[47] Matrimony was a requirement to generate legitimate progeny who in turn were only considered as legal heirs. In addition to that, marriage regularised sexual relationships between women and men.[48]

In the *Erfðaþáttur* ("inheritance section") of *Grágás* it is said that *"sonur á að taka arf að föður sinn og móður, frjálsborinn og arfgengur."*[49] Later a definition is added as to what constitutes a person to be a legal heir: *"Eigi eru allir men arfgengir þótt frjálsbornir sér. Sá maður er eigi arfgegnir er móðir hans er eigi mundi keypt, mörk eða meira fé, eða eigi brullaup til gert eða eigi föstnuð."*[50] According to this, a child was only allowed to take over its parents' property if its parents fulfilled the requirements for a legally recognised marriage. Both marriage law and inheritance law were obviously closely interwoven, and thus, interdependent.

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[45] Jochens, *Women in Old Norse Society*, 20.
[46] These two groups were subdivided into freeborn but dependent men (*leiglendingar*) and freedmen (*leysingjar*). For more details on the social classes in medieval Iceland during the Free State period see Hastrup, *Culture and History, in Medieval Iceland – An Anthropological Analysis of Structure and Change* (Oxford: Clarendon Press: 1985), 105-135, and Jesse Byock, *Viking Age Iceland* (London: Penguin Books, 2001).
[47] Bandlien, *Strategies of Passion*, 4; see also Kirsten Hastrup, *Culture and History*, 90.
[48] Ibid., 90/91; see also Jochens, *Women in Old Norse Society*, 20.
[49] *Gg*, *Erfðaþáttur*, Gunnar Karlsson, Kristján Sveinsson and Mörður Árnarson, ed., *Grágás – Lagasafn íslenska þjóðveldisins* (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 1992), 47.
[50] Ibid., 49.

To enter into matrimony, however, required that the future spouses were a *jafnræði* ("equal match") with regard to their social rank and prosperity.[51] Aside from this initial situation, a legal marriage furthermore consisted of the three main elements *mundr* ("bride's wealth" which is already mentioned in the above stated quote), *festar* ("betrothals") and *brúðlaup* ("wedding feast"). The groom's family was obligated to pay the *mundr* to the bride's marriage guardian which officially became the bride's possession after the wedding was consummated.[52] Woman and man were considered to be affianced once they had made their betrothals along with which the bride's wealth was paid and the wedding day was scheduled. These promises were officially binding, and the breaking off of an engagement was considered to be a serious issue and implied not only the "loss" of the bride's wealth but also the dowry that was paid by the marriage guardian.[53]

> Ef sá ifast ráða er sér hefir konu festa, og varðar eigi við lög, en mund skal heimta svo sem mæltur var, og með þeim máldraga sem mælt var að festamálum, ef hann skyldi af hendi leysa. En hann á kost að stefna að heimili þess er sóttur er, eða þar er stefnustaður er réttur, um allan mund saman, enda er kostur að stefna þar er brúðkaup er mælt, og um allan mundinn saman, hinn næsta dag rúmhelgan því er ráð skyldu takast ok skal sækja við festavottorð, en dómur skal dæma gjalddaga svo sem vættið bar máldaga til.[54]

A similar rule certainly applies if the marriage guardian of the bride issues any caveat and finally decides to terminate a betrothal.

> En ef sá ifast ráða er konuna hefir fastnað, þá skal hinn fara þangað […] Og rétt er honum [supposed groom] að stefna um heimanfylgju þá, er þá skyldi fram koma, og svo um það fé er hinn skyldi til brúðkaups leggja. Enda er réttað heimta heimanfulgju með slíkum máldaga öllum sem áður var tint of mundinn, ef hann þurfti að heimta.[55]

Women were, regardless of their age, always represented by a marriage guardian[56] who was usually either their brother or father. If neither father nor brother(s) were alive even their mother could assume this responsibility.[57] *"[…] En þá er faðir fastnandi dóttur sinnar. En þá skal bróðir samfeðri fastna systur sína. En ef eigi er bróðir, þá skal fastna móðir dóttur sína. Þar aðeins fastnar kona konu."*[58] In this connection it seems

[51] Jochens, *Women in Old Norse Society*, 24.
[52] Hastrup, *Culture and History*, 94.
[53] Ibid., 93.
[54] *Gg, Festaþáttur*, 113.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Men who were under sixteen were also represented by a so-called marriage guardian.
[57] Jochens, *Women in Old Norse Society*, 25; see also Hastrup, *Culture and Histroy*, 93.
[58] *Gg, Festaþáttur* 1, 109.

noteworthy to mention that the future bride, although she (probably) had the greatest interest in the agreement, was kept away from the negotiations, and usually had no vote concerning the choice of her future husband. Consequently, a wooer could only be rejected by the marriage guardian but not by the woman herself.[59] A woman's needs or desires were of especially little concern. Whatever promoted marriage, it happened according to the above mentioned rules and social standards, and was often conducted on behalf of the interests of a family as opposed to merely love or even romance.

With these thoughts on matrimony in mind, this work proceeds to the analyses of the three Eddic poems to demonstrate similarities and/or prove a deep entrenchment of these norms even in the mythological narratives, with their roots in a (pre-)Christian era.

[59] Jochens, *Women in Old Norse Society*, 25.

5. *Skírnismál* - Winning the Woman: Wooing, Threatening, and Cursing – Anything Goes

5.1. *Skírnismál* – Tradition and Content

The Eddic poem *Skírnismál*, denoted as *Fǫr Skírnirs* ("*Skírnir*'s journey") and consisting of 42 stanzas is completely preserved in the Codex Regius manuscript. Beyond that, the prose prologue and stanzas 1-27 are contained in the fragmentary manuscript AM 748 I 4to, and moreover, stanza 42 is quoted in *Gylfaginning* 37, but displays here a different wording.[60] In addition to a prose prologue, two (further) prose insertions are part of the poem and follow after stanzas 10 and 39. The prevailing metre in *Skírnismál* is *ljóðaháttr*, but *galdralag* and *fornyrðislag* can also be found.[61]

Skírnismál tells of the giantess *Gerðr* who lives at her father's abode and is watched by *Freyr* while sitting on *Hliðskiálfr, Óðinn*'s high seat. As the *vanr* becomes lovesick his servant *Skírnir* sets off to win *Gerðr* for *Freyr*. Together with her maiden, *Gerðr* is at her well-protected hall when the stranger *Skírnir* arrives. Once she invites the visitor into her hall, he urges her to agree to his wooing, which he conducts on behalf of *Freyr*. The giantess expresses her rejection, which in turn evokes threats on the part of *Skírnir*. These uttered curses finally lead to *Gerðr*'s subjection and her inevitable succumbing to *Skírnir*'s demand of meeting *Freyr.*

In addition to this account, *Gerðr* is also mentioned in several other sources. These are *Gylfaginning* 37, *Ynglinga saga* 10, the Eddic poem *Hyndluljóð* 30 and *Skáldkaparmál* 1. There is, indeed, more than one written source that addresses the tie between *Gerðr* and *Freyr*, but yet, the focus is on the poem *Skírnismál* since it is unique with regard to the other sources mentioned above: the poem reports solely on the proceedings of *Skírnir* to accomplish the purpose of his journey: the winning of the female. The account enables us to obtain more information about the relationship between women and men as well as accepted or at least tolerated behaviour patterns governing the courtship that precedes both betrothal and matrimony.

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[60] *Gylf* 37, here *Freyr* says: *"Lǫng er nótt,/ lǫng er ǫnnur,/ hvé mega ek þreya þrjár?/ Opt mér mánaðr/ minni þótti/ en sjá hálf hýnótt."*; in *Skm* 42 he says: *"Lǫng er nótt-/ langar ro tvær-/ hvé um þreyiak þriár?/ Opt mér mánaðr/ minni þótti/ en siá hálf hýnótt."*.

[61] Klaus von See et al., *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda, Band 2: Götterlieder - Skírnismál, Hárbarðslióð, Hymiskviða, Lokasenna, Þrymskviða* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 1997), 58.

5.2 Just Courtship or Smoothing the Way for Matrimony?

Until stanza 14 *Gerðr* has no agency within the poem but is solely described by the prose introduction and the male protagonists *Freyr*, *Skírnir* and the shepherd (*hirðir*). The prologue informs the reader that *Freyr* caught sight of a female while sitting illicitly at *Hliðskiálfr*. The girl's identity is merely revealed by her current whereabouts, her name, however, is not referred to. Nevertheless, she appears to *Freyr* as the most appealing female: *"Í Gymis gǫrðum/ ek sá ganga/ mér tíða mey:/ armar lýsto/ en af þaðan/ alt lopt ok lǫgr."*[62] With these words *Freyr* creates a very concise and strong picture of his inamorata that underlines his despair. He also emphasises the girl's physical appearance. The female, hence, must have had a stirring effect, and beyond that, she must have been in compliance with the social ideal of beauty[63], as the motif of brightly shining arms or the comparison of the beloved with the sun were frequently used to delineate women's attractiveness.[64]

And yet, *Freyr* becomes virtually lovesick in stanza 7: *"Mær er mér tíðari/ en manni hveim/ ungum í árdaga;/ ása ok álfa/ þat vill engi maðr/ at vit samt sém."* A reason for the mentioned denial of a possible relationship between the *vanr* and the giantess, certainly, is not explained. An explanation could be the social inequality that seems to be apparent to *Freyr* as *Gerðr* and him do not belong to the same social class and thus, are not *jafnræði*. Accordingg to Jenny Jochens' studies on marriage in Old Norse society, *"the most stringent requirement was to stay within the social class into which one was born."*[65] Applied to the mythological society, this meant that a marriage between *Gerðr* and *Freyr* was probably ill-fated albeit a conjugal union between giantesses and male *vanir* was not explicitly prohibited.[66]

According to the first prose insertion (after stanza 10), *Gerðr*, who is now mentioned for the first time by name, seems to be well guarded: *"Þar vóro hundar ólmir, ok bundnir fyrir skíðgarðs hliði, þess er um sal Gerðar var"*. *Gerðr* seems so precious to her father *Gymir* that she is in need of protection. Due to that, he 'fences' her and deploys

[62] *Skm* 6.
[63] The ideal of beauty that presumably was prevalent at the time of composing.
[64] Ursula Dronke, *The Poetic Edda: Volume II – Mythological Poems* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 406.
[65] Jochens, *Women in Old Norse Society*, 21.
[66] See chapter 3.2 on the hierarchy of the Old Norse mythological world. Here the marriage between the giantess *Skaði* and the *vanr Njǫrðr* is mentioned which later fails according to *Skskm* 1.

frightening dogs to keep strangers away from her. As her father and guardian, *Gymir* is able to decide who she is going to be married to: a man that is to him the most dignified.[67] The protection measures around *Gerðr*'s hall, thus, should be considered as preventive, keeping her from falling in love with anyone, and/or choosing her husband autonomously. In accordance with this latter suggestion is the shepherd's utterance *"Þú skalt æ vera/ góðrar meyiar Gymis"*[68] – *Skírnir* does not merit to be with *Gymir*'s daughter.[69] *Gymir*'s power as a guardian is expressed, even though implicitly. He alone will give his daughter in marriage, and to consolidate this power, he has made provisions against unwanted wooers who could take advantage of his absence.

As previously mentioned *Gerðr*'s debut in *Skírnismál* as an active protagonist does not appear until stanza 14. Her part of the conversation only covers 6 stanzas, and then she is again silenced.[70] Despite her rather small amount of speech, a distinct picture is drawn by the female herself. *Gerðr* meets the arriving stranger with hospitality by offering him mead in her hall, *"inn bið þú hann ganga/ í okkarn sal/ ok drekka inn mæra miǫð"*[71]. Nevertheless, her words convey that she is acting counterintuitively, and by that maintaining her composure, as *Gerðr* utters afterwards *"-þó ek hitt óumk/ at hér úti sér/ minn bróðurbani."*[72] The female's presentiment that the stranger's visit might not be based on good intentions is further highlighted by her questions about his identity in stanza 17.[73]

Without revealing his identity, *Skírnir* directly starts the wooing to win *Gerðr* for *Freyr*. The first attempt employs the golden apples of the goddess *Iðunn*[74] which are *"a symbol of immortality and love"*[75]. This is accompanied by a second endeavour, involving the golden ring *Draupnir*[76] *"that drips new gold rings every ninth night, an image of*

[67] In line with this interpretation would also be the idea of a gilded cage.
[68] *Skm* 12.
[69] It is indeed eligible to raise the question if this applies likewise to *Freyr* or if the shepherd is aware of *Skírnir*'s representative function.
[70] In total eight stanzas can be allocated to *Gerðr*. Besides the discussed stanzas, these stanzas are 37 and 39.
[71] *Skm* 16.
[72] *Skm* 16.
[73] *"Hvat er þat álfa/ né ása sona/ né vís[s]a vana?/ Hví þú einn um komt/ eikinn fúr yfir/ ór salkynni at siá?".*
[74] The story of *Iðunn* is told in *Gylf* 26.
[75] Ursula Dronke, "Art and Tradition in *Skírnismál*," in *English and Medieval Studies – Presented to J. R.R. Tolkien on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Norman Davis and Charles L. Wrenn (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1962), 252.
[76] *Draupnir* is mentioned in *Gylf* 49, and in *Skskm* 35.

constant renewal and resource"[77]. Prima facie, these valuables could be understood as ordinary wooing gifts to fawn on, and eventually persuade the female. In respect of the subsequent events, it certainly seems most likely that these precious offers are part of a well organised and planned underlying procedure. The aim of this is not simply to win *Gerðr*'s heart but rather to bend the giantess to *Skírnir*'s (*Freyr*'s), and thus man's, will in order to establish a conjugal union between her and the *vanr*. Thus, both the apples and the ring represent the *mundr* of the Old Norse mythological world: They do not merely entail an amount of money that was paid by the future husband's family to the female's marriage guardian, but rather were of a very high mythological significance. *Skírnir*'s course of action is doubtless of a strategically sophisticated nature.

Considering that *Gymir* is absent, *Skírnir* directly 'offers' the *mundr* to *Gerðr* herself.[78] In doing so the servant ignores not only the actual decisional power of *Gerðr*'s custodian but also *Gerðr*'s own opinion as he does not request *Gerðr* to contemplate a relationship with *Freyr*. Instead *Skírnir* literally claims the giantess' consent.[79]

The female, however, refuses both times while responding in stanza 20 *"Epli ellilyfs/ ek þigg aldregi/ at mannzkis munom,/ né vit Frey[r], meðan okkart fǫr lifir,/ byggiom bæði saman."*, and stanza 22 *"Baug ek þikkak -/ þótt brendr sé/ með ungom Óðins syni./ Era mér gullz vant/ í gǫrðum Gymis,/ at deila fé fǫður."* She clarifies unambiguously that *Skírnir* and *Freyr*, and respectively any other man, will never possess her like an object, and that she rejects a conjugal union with *Freyr* outright. Moreover, *Gerðr* highlights her father's riches, which she relies on and is pleased with, as she is his only child and will probably inherit them someday.[80] As was already mentioned in chapter 5, a son was usually the lawful heir of parental possessions. According to *Grágás*, in rare cases even a daughter could assume this function: *"[…] Nú er eigi sonur til, þá skal dóttir."*[81] In other words, should anything happen to *Gymir Gerðr* could become a surrogated son, and

[77] Dronke, "Art and Tradition," 252/253.
[78] *Gymir* has neither a speaking part in the poem nor does *Skírnir* act hasty nor seems the servant to be worried of the father's return. The poem does not provide any information about *Gymir*'s whereabouts.
[79] *"Neither Grágás nor the oldest provincial Norwegian laws contain stipulations about seeking women's approval for marriage but specify that fathers or other male relatives were responsible for the betrothal and marriage of their womenfolk."*, Jenny Jochens, "Consent in Marriage: Old Norse Law, Life, And Literature," *Scandinavian Studies* 58 (1986): 143/144.
[80] von See, *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda, Band 2*, 100; 104.
[81] *Gg, Erfðaþáttur*, 47.

thus could inherit from her father as no other member of the first tier existed in accordance with the phrase *"[…] better a son who is your daughter than no son at all."*[82]

This fundamental refusal of the wooing gifts causes, instead of an ordinary approval, threats of violence and thus a change of *Skírnir*'s strategy: *"Sér þú þenna mæki, mær,/ mjóvan, málfán, […]/ Hǫfuð hǫggva/ ek mun þér hálsi af,/ nema þú mér sætt segir."*[83] And yet, *Gerðr* does not give in, *"Ánauð þola/ ek vil aldregi/ at mannykis munom-"*[84] which causes a second menace directed at *Gerðr*'s family: *"Sér þú þenna mæki, mær,/ mjóvan, málfán, […]/Fyr þessum eggjum/ hnígr sá inn aldni jǫtunn,/ verðr þinn feigr faðir."*[85] As Helga Kress proposes in her article *Taming the Shrew: The Rise of Patriarchy and the Subordination of the Feminine in Old Norse Literature* (2002), the conquest of the female represents an initiation ritual into manhood. To become established in a male dominated society is inevitable for *Freyr*.[86] The use of violence, and in particular the intimidation with a sword, Kress argues, is a typical manner in which a woman is bent to men's will: *"With the sword men keep women in check. With it they tame the shrew."*[87] That is exactly what can be observed in *Skírnismál*: *Skírnir* threatens *Gerðr* not once, but twice with a weapon that stands for male power, and a weapon which women made no use as it rather served to conquer females.[88]

Gerðr is immediately cut short after her confident words in stanza 24.[89] The following stanzas 25-36 constitute a rather prominent monologue since it comprises threats against several levels or spheres of the female's life and her self-conception.[90] However, the section is probably most outstanding due to *Gerðr*'s silence. The silencing of a female is a recurring pattern within Old Norse literature, especially in the context of

[82] Clover, "Regardless of Sex," 5.
[83] *Skm* 23.
[84] *Skm* 24.
[85] *Skm* 25.
[86] Helga Kress, "Taming the Shrew: The Rise of Patriarchy and the Subordination of the Feminine in Old Norse Literature," in *Cold Counsel: Women in Old Norse Literature and Mythology*, ed. Sarah May Anderson and Karen Swenson (New York: Garland, 2002), 83.
[87] Ibid., 89.
[88] Ibid., 83, 90.
[89] It is obvious that *Gerðr*'s words carry no weight for *Skírnir* as he does not take them into account. Ibid., 82.
[90] Joseph Harris, "Cursing With the Thistle: '*Skírnismál*' 31, 6-8, and OE Metrical Charm 9, 16-17," in *The Poetic Edda – Essays on Old Norse Mythology*, ed. Paul Acker and Carolyne Larrington (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 86.

gaining superiority over women.[91] Carol Clover states that *"[…] tongue wielding is a conspicuously female activity. But it also acknowledges the commensurability of the tongue and the sword."*[92] She further proposes that *"the tongue may be a lesser weapon, the 'sword' of the unswordworthy, but it is a weapon nonetheless, and one whose effects could be serious indeed."*[93] In other words, while cutting the giantess short, *Skírnir* disarms the female in a metaphorical sense. He takes away her voice, which is her only weapon to defend herself and to express her independence, confidence, and own will.

The following monologue is featured by a curse that *"creates for the accursed a negative of the hoped-for or expected world, reflecting inversely the normal world of the curser and his victim."*[94] Its efficacy is strengthened by employing the recurring use of oxymora in order to underline the hopelessness *Gerðr* is going to face if she is not willing to cooperate. In stanza 26-35, *Skírnir* threatens the giantess with invisibility, isolation and the lack of appetite. In addition to that, public attention in form of staring, sadness, compulsion and grief, physical torture, randomness, a three-headed husband or no husband at all, unsatisfied desire, and the wrath of the gods *Freyr*, *Óðinn*, and *Þórr* continue the menaces. As if this was not enough, *Skírnir* also denies *Gerðr* any sexual pleasure, and threatens her with living close to the realm of the dead as well as to drink goat's urine. He finally menaces to carve a *þ* (þurs, stanza 37),[95] a letter which is closely connected with women's misery. Since it also stands for a link between *Gerðr* and the giant *Hrímgrímnir***,** it had an especially strong effect on *Gerðr*.[96]

Carol Clover then lists several insults that appear in so-called *flytings* to which belong *senna* and *mannjafnaðr*. Among them are the assault on the opponent's appearance (*"At undrsjónum þú verðir"* stanza 28), sexual irregularity *("þitt geð grip,/ þik morn morni;"* stanza 31) as well as the consumption of tabooed things *("þér […] geita hland gefi;/ æðri drykkju/ fá þú aldregi,"* stanza 35). All of these are uttered to demonstrate the inferiority of the insulted. Both men and women could accuse each other in such actions for

[91] Kress, "Taming the Shrew," 85. Kress refers to examples from the *fornaldarsögur, legendary romances* but also from the *Íslendingasögur*.
[92] Clover, "Regardless of Sex," 15/16.
[93] Ibid.
[94] Harris, "Cursing With the Thistle," 85.
[95] *Skírnir* mentions a twig with which he wants to tame *Gerðr* in stanza 26. This is presumably the object on which *Skírnir* threatens to carve the rune.
[96] von See, *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda, Band* 2, 134/135. Helga Kress, however, interprets *Gerðr*'s reaction as a plain and simple capitulation to *Skírnir*. Kress, "Taming the Shrew," 82.

defamation but *"[…] a woman in either role [insulter or insultee] usually faces off against a man, not another woman, and although she may score a lot of direct hits, in the end she always loses."*[97] In *Skírnimsál*, too, the giantess has no chance to emerge victorious from the conversation: *Gerðr* has to give in and to accept her fate.

The last part of the poem (stanza 37-39) then displays that the female is overcome by *Skírnir*'s threats. The curse unsettled the giantess so much that she 'froze', and started to treat *Skírnir* like a guest. Not before the threats reached their climax does *Gerðr* collects herself, and finally finds her voice again: *"Heill ver þú nú heldr, sveinn,/ ok tak við hrímkálki/ fullom forns miaðar/-þó hafða ek þat ætlat,/ at myndak aldregi/ unna vaningia vel."*[98] But yet, the legate is still not completely satisfied with the effect of his words, and forces the female to make a point about a time and place for meeting *Freyr*. It seems his errand is not accomplished until *Gerðr* makes a promise that resembles a betrothal. The giantess eventually agrees to meet *Freyr* at the end of nine nights in a grove called *Barri "þar min Njarðar syni/ Gerðr unna gamans."*[99] The female's obtained commitment consequently contains the second and the third elements that lead to matrimony: *festar*, and a date for a *bryllaup*, and thus *Skírnir*'s mission is eventually completed.

The giantess' giving in is accompanied by the act of speaking about herself in the third person, *"mun […]Gerðr unna gammans"*[100], which emphasises the transition from a once strong and independent women to a now subservient and weak character. It seems likely that *Gerðr* was broken by the cursing, and became a figure that does not resemble the former *Gerðr* anymore.

Helga Kress addresses the attempts at defence of female characters in Old Norse literature as well, and finally concludes:

> […] strong women in Old Norse literature […] are not free. But they are strong, and their strength consists in resisting oppression – they refuse to be oppressed. They do not succeed, but their protest is everywhere in the text.[101]

At this stage it seems appropriate to raise the question of whether the female protagonist ever had a choice. And furthermore whether she ever was autonomous in her choice of a husband or if she only thought herself that way, and therefore deceived herself.

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[97] Clover, "Regardless of Sex," 8.
[98] *Skm* 37.
[99] *Skm* 39.
[100] *Skm* 39.
[101] Kress, "Taming the Shrew," 91.

5.3 Interim Conclusion

The above conducted study has shown that the elements that lead to matrimony, *mundr*, *festar*, and *brullaup* are embedded even in the mythological narrative of the Eddic poem *Skírnismál*. The same applies to the associated regulations and laws which can be found in medieval Icelandic legal texts. It seems most likely that *Gerðr* never had an actual personal choice of a husband nor was she (ever) independent. Instead she was patronised by her father *Gymir* who acted as her marriage guardian, and had to subordinate to his safety precautions. As a female giantess, *Gerðr* could be traded like an object between the individual social classes, no limits were set regarding courtship to win a woman. *Skírnir* starts his wooing on behalf of *Freyr* with gifts to win *Gerðr*'s affection.

As this strategy proves to be unpromising, he progresses to threats of violence against the female as well as her family. When this attempt also fails, *Skírnir* adopts more drastic measures: in the truest sense of the word he disarms the giantess by taking away her only weapon, her voice and starts threatening to dash all her wishes and desires. This finally leads to *Gerðr*'s pledge to a conjugal union with *Freyr*. In following the customs of the patriarchal Old Norse society, this is a consent that is achieved by force rather than by desire or the pursuit of love.

6. *Alvíssmál* – To Lead the Bride Home or Not

6.1 *Alvíssmál* – Tradition and Content

The Eddic poem *Alvíssmál* is the last of the mythological lays that are preserved in the Codex Regius. Thereafter follows the second section which is comprised by the heroic poems. The name *Alvíssmál* is provided by the poem itself as the manuscript exhibits the words "*alvi*^{S} *mal"* at the end of its first verse.[102] Apart from this, stanza 20 and 30 are quoted in Snorri Sturluson's *Skáldskaparmál* chapters 59 and 63.

Alvíssmál starts in medias res with the dialogue between the dwarf *Alvíss* ("All-knowing" or "All-wise") and the *áss Þórr*. The dialogue is featured by alternating speeches of one stanza per character, and a verbal exchange of insults to demonstrate the right for the female. Stanzas 8 and 9 are both spoken solely by *Þórr*, and thus denote the transition from the frame story (stanza 1-8, 35) to the wisdom contest (stanza 9-34). In total *Þórr* states 13 questions, and all of them are answered by his opponent *Alvíss*. *Alvíssmál* can be referred to as wisdom poetry although it does not involve mythological wisdom or rules of life but rather focuses on language(s) itself.[103] The poem is almost exclusively composed in *ljóðaháttr*.

From *Alvíssmál*, the reader learns that the dwarf *Alvíss* has been engaged to *Þórr*'s daughter whose name is not referred to. Now the future husband wants to take home his bride, an action that *Þórr* tries to avert because he had not been around when the betrothal between dwarf and *ásynja* took place. As the father of the bride, *Þórr* claims the right to marry his daughter off according to his demands. This, again, leads to a one-sided wisdom contest (conducted by *Þórr*), and finally to the dwarf's death caused by trickery.

6.2 The Final Authority – The Bride's Father

Although scholars have studied *Alvíssmál* from different angles (with focus on the wisdom contest, wording, and interaction between frame story and wisdom contest),[104]

[102] von See, Klaus et al., *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda, Band 3: Götterlieder – Volundarkvið, Alvíssmál, Baldrs draumar, Rígsþula, Hyndlolióð, Grottasongr* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2000), 268.
[103] Ibid., 287.
[104] For example Moberg, Klingenberg etc.

little attention has been drawn to the unnamed character in the poem, *Þórr*'s daughter, and the contained conjugal elements and behaviour patterns.

Skáldskaparmál 12 informs that *Þórr* is the father of the *ásynja Þrúðr*, as is said here: "*Hvernig skal kenna Þór? Svá at kalla hann [...] faðir Magna ok Móða ok Þrúðar [...]*."[105] Aside from this, *Þrúðr* is mentioned in the Skaldic poem *Ragnarsdrápa*, where her name appears in connection with the giant *Hrungnir* who is called *"Þrúðar þjófr"*[106] ("thief of *Þrúðr*"). Based on this, it seems most likely that *Þórr* had only one daughter and that *Alvíssmál* refers to the same *ásynja* although her name is not revealed here. Both speakers, *Alvíss* and *Þórr*, who are also unnamed until stanza 3 and 6, denote the female character in stanzas 1, 2 and 4 as *"brúðr"* ("bride"). The word *brúðr* features a strong analogy to the assumed name *Þrúðr*, as only the initial letters *b* and *þ* differ from each other.

Even though both speakers are unaware of each other's identity, *Þórr* compares the wooer *Alvíss* to a giant and clarifies that as such he was unworthy to marry the already betrothed girl: *"[...] Þúrsa líki/ þykki mér á þér vera;/ ertattu til brúðar borinn."*[107] Not until the stranger has introduced himself with the words *"Alvíss ek heiti*"[108] and revealed his dwelling place as well as his intentions does the bride's father recognise him as a dwarf rather than a giant.[109] The dwarf moreover highlights the meaning of such a promise that was already made to him: *"bregði engi fǫstu heiti fira."*[110]

As *Þórr* has not revealed himself as the bride's father, it seems evident that *Alvíss* emphasises that betrothals were binding on all parties. In compliance to *Grágás* the breaking off of an engagement entails that the future spouse could claim expected costs for the wedding feast as well as the *mundr* that his family paid for the bride.[111] The bride's

[105] *Skskm* 4; *Skskm* 21 also refers to *Sif*, *Þórr*'s wife, as *"móðir Þrúðar"*.
[106] von See, *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda, Band 3*, 274. The myth of the rape of *Þrúr* is solely mentioned in *Ragnarsdrápa*, and is not referred to in other sources. For further readings on *Ragnarsdrápa* see Rolf Stavnem, "The Kennings in *Ragnarsdrápa*," *Medieval Scandinavia* 14 (2004): 161-184.
[107] *Alv* 2.
[108] Ibid.
[109] In accordance with other written accounts, giants tend to lust for the goddesses; e.g. in *Haustlǫng* 8-11 the giant *Þjazi* rapes *Iðunn*; *The Haustlǫng of Þjóðólfr of Hvinir*. Edited by Richard North. Enfield Lock: Hisarlik Press, 1997, 4-6; *Vsp* 25 and *Gylf* 42 thematise the giving away of *Óðr*'s girl respectively *Freyja* to the giants; in *Þrk* the giant *Þrymr* claims *Freyja* as his bride in exchange for *Þórr*'s hammer *Mjölnir*. Another instance for dwarfs seeking for a goddess can be found in *Sǫrla þáttr*. Here four dwarfs urge intercourse with *Freyja* for a golden ring they crafted for her. *Sǫrla þáttr* in *Flateyjarbók I*, ed. Sigurður Nordal (Reykjavík: Flateyjarútgáfan, 1944), 303-314.
[110] *Alv* 3.
[111] *Gg*, *Festaþáttur* 7, 113.

father could likewise reclaim the already paid dowry in case the future husband himself would terminate the engagement.[112]

Þórr, nevertheless, wants to break off the engagement between the dwarf and his daughter as he was absent when their promises were made: *"Ek mun bregða,/ þvíat ek brúðar á/ flest um ráð sem faðir./ Varka ek heima,/ þá er þér heitit var,/ at sá einn er gjǫfir með goðum."*[113] According to the law texts it was not possible to deprive *Þórr*, as the father of the bride, of his right to dispose her of in marriage. As *Þórr* himself did not promise *Þrúðr* to *Alvíss* he evidently is in power to terminate the engagement or cancel the wedding without any legal consequences. *"En ef sá maður fastnar konu er eigi er lögráðandi, þá varðar hinum ekki er lögráðandi er þó að hann renni ráðunum, og svo og öðrum mönnum."*[114]

In contrast to *Skírnismál* the poem *Alvíssmál* leaves the reader in the dark about possible circumstances that might have led to the engagement between *ásynja* and dwarf. Thus, it seems conceivable that the wooer *Alvíss* used a similar approach as *Skírnir* did above, although a non-violent persuasion based "merely" on bribery by employing gifts could be presumed. Additionally, even love, or at least affection, is to be considered in this case. For *Alvíssmál*, however, only suppositions can be made as the preceding courtship is completely omitted.

Henceforth the female who is the centre of attention is not referred to as "brúðr" anymore. Instead *Alvíss* calls her *"fljóðs ins fagrlóa"*[115] and *"it mjallhvíta man"*[116], two characterisations that only refer to the girl's outward appearance. Klaus von See points out that the second attribute, *"mjallhvíta"* is presumably a varying resumption of the former description *"fagrlóa"*, and relates to the female's bright skin if not her fair hair. To describe a woman's skin and emphasise its brightness was a stylistic device to underline her noble derivation.[117] A similar utterance is expressed by *Freyr* in *Skírnimsál* 6, where he describes the giantess *Gerðr* as a female with *"armar lýstu/ en af þaðan/ allt*

[112] *Gg*, *Festaþáttur* 7, 113.
[113] *Alv* 4.
[114] *Gg*, *Festaþáttur* 8, 114.
[115] *Alv* 5.
[116] *Alv* 7.
[117] von See, *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda, Band 3*, 319.

lopt ok lǫgr."[118] *Alvíss*, as well as *Freyr*, explains very metaphorically how much the physical appearance of the female affected him and caused in him such desire for her.[119]

Þórr, however, makes no reference to his daughter's appearance but rather characterises her as *"unga man"*,[120] as he has, unlike the dwarf, no sexual interest in her. *Alvíss*' conspicuously strong desire for *Þrúðr* finds expression in stanza 7: *"eiga vilja,/ heldr en án vera,/ þat it mjallhvíta man."*[121] The attitude that is revealed by the dwarf is somewhat exceptional, and would instead be expected from a giant or a berserk.[122] Dwarfs have a very restricted role within the Old Norse mythology and even the written sources themselves proclaim that there is not much known about them.

Ármann Jakobsson emphasises the problems of the portrayal of dwarfs in his article *The Hole: Problems in Medieval Dwarfology* (2005), and highlights that these supernatural beings are of a negative nature. According to Ármann, dwarfs are labelled by absence rather than presence as they have an enigmatic identity and their lives are concealed. In addition to that, one can also learn from the written accounts that dwarfs are, indeed, rather short (in terms of their body size), and that there are no female representatives among them.[123] The sources also claim that dwarfs are linked to the making of the mead of poetry[124], and that they work as smiths to provide treasures for the *æsir*. Thus, dwarfs seem to have only one function within the mythological narratives: to serve the gods. They are pictured as asexual and without any need for females.[125]

It is therefore all the more astonishing that *Alvíss* courts *Þrúðr* and acts as a persistent wooer or fiancé who wants to lead an *ásynja* home.[126] *Þórr*'s wondrousness about a dwarf who attempts to marry his daughter is implied in his comment about *Alvíss* in stanza 2 in which he compares him with a giant: *"Þursa líki/ þykki mér á þér vera;"*. Not only does *Alvíss* seem to show a similar outward appearance with giants but he also acts like one.

[118] *Skm* 6.
[119] See chapter 5.2.
[120] *Alv* 6.
[121] *Alv* 7.
[122] See footnote 105 on giants seeking for goddesses rather than dwarfs. Ármann Jakobsson, "The Hole: Problems in Medieval Dwarfology," *Arv: Nordic Yearbook of Folklore* 61 (2005): 61.
[123] Ibid., 68.
[124] *Skskm* 1.
[125] Liberman, "What Happened to Female Dwarfs?," 260/261. Already mentioned in chapter 4.3.
[126] Paul Acker, "Dwarf-lore in *Alvíssmál*," in *The Poetic Edda – Essays on Old Norse Mythology*, ed. Paul Acker and Carolyne Larrington (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 215.

In other words *"Alvíss loses the unsociability of dwarfs in other tales when this tale demands he play the role of sexual interloper."*[127]

This is, however, not the only inconsistency that can be observed within the poem. Paul Acker moreover states that *Þórr*'s function stands in contrast with his usual responsibility. Instead of gaining something from his opponent, the *áss* has to avert the dwarf's intention to abduct his daughter from his homestead.[128]

Another outstanding difference to *Þórr*'s 'usual' behaviour which mainly encompasses the slaying of trolls and giants to avert any danger from the gods and humans is his role as a wisdom gaining character. *Þórr* demands that *Alvíss* has to answer all of his questions in the form of a wisdom contest to become *Þrúðr*'s legal husband. *"Meyjar ástum/ muna þér verða,/ vísi gestr, of varit,/ ef þú ór heimi kannt/ hverjum at segja/ allt þat er ek vil vita."*[129] The contest finally ends when *Þórr* outwits *Alvíss* by distracting him so much that the dwarf is heedless of the dawn. This, eventually, becomes his downfall. In other words both agents undertake a task that contradicts the actual depiction which Old Norse mythology ascribes them elsewhere.

Now that the male speaking characters in *Alvíssmál* and their actions have been analysed, the source for the dialogue should be brought back into focus: *Þórr*'s daughter, the assumed *Þrúðr*. As already observed, the poem does not mention the female character by her name but only identifies her through her father's descent. Additionally, *Þrúðr* has no active performance within the poem. Instead the two males negotiate about her as if she was not present.

The *ásynja*'s own position seems of no significance either. Whether or not she loves the dwarf and wants to leave with him, and also the question of whether or not he tried to abduct her while her father was away, are not discussed at any point in the poem. Instead the girl is voiceless and has no bearing on the happenings. All the information the reader gains about her is based on the descriptions of the dwarf and her lineage. The few references about *Þrúðr* are illustrated from a male angle, and basically concern the female's appearance. The illustrated gaps and silences of the frame story, along with the dominating behaviour of *Þórr* underline prevalent social norms amongst the *æsir*, and between the *æsir* and other supernatural beings: A strong superiority of the male over the

[127] Paul Acker, "Dwarf-lore in *Alvíssmál*," 217.
[128] Ibid.
[129] *Alv* 8.

female particularly the father's decisional power over his daughter, as well as the social domination of the *æsir* can be recognised. The matrimony between *Þrúðr* and the dwarf *Alvíss* was a prohibited alliance that encompasses the hypogamy of the *ásynja*. In accordance with the rules among the mythological beings such a connection was beyond dispute as *ásynjur* were only allowed to marry male *æsir* to maintain the supremacy of the gods within the mythological universe. A union between *Þrúðr* and *Alvíss*, however, would have endangered the mythological 'balance' involving a loss of power for the *æsir*. This was a very similar situation to the event of a marriage between an *ásynja* and a giant. An incident that by all means had to be averted.

6.3 Interim Conclusion

The above conducted textual analysis has shown that the Eddic lay *Alvíssmál* also features conjugal elements that can be found in the Icelandic law codex *Grágás*. Here the focus is on the guardianship as well as on both *festar* and *brullaup*, whereas *mundr* is left out.

Þórr has been away when his daughter *Þrúðr* was promised to the dwarf *Alvíss*, but the legal guardian of the bride insists on his right to choose *Þrúðr*'s husband which leads to a one-sided wisdom contest, and finally to the would-be husband's death. In this way not only is *Þórr*'s power as a father and marriage guardian shown, but also the underlying social hierarchy that has to be maintained: the god's supremacy over all other mythological beings. An *ásynja* could only marry endogamously but never exogamously into another social group. *Þrúðr*, however, could not be traded into the group of dvergar.

Another important marriage element that *Alvíssmál* highlights is the missing voice of the bride herself, which is reflected in *Þrúðr*'s lacking agency within the whole poem. All the negotiations are settled among father and future spouse whereas the bride's opinion is not considered at all. Again, the superiority of the male over the female is obvious.

7. *Þrymskviða* – One Bride Is Not Like Another

7.1 *Þrymskviða* – Tradition and Content

The myth of the stolen hammer is only found in the Eddic poem *Þrymskviða*, and neither *Snorra Edda* nor Skaldic poetry refer to it. Although the loss of *Þórr*'s hammer is not mentioned elsewhere, the poem makes use of a specific theme: the deprivation and regaining of a divine attribute like *Iðunn*'s apples or *Freyja*'s necklace.[130] In total *Þrymskviða* encompasses 33 stanzas which are a combination of both narrative and dialogical stanzas. The whole lay is composed in *fornyrðislag*. Unlike *Alvíssmál*, where only two figures have an agency, six mythological characters get a chance to speak in *Þrymskviða*: *Þórr*, *Loki*, *Freyja*, *Heimdallr*, *Þrymr*, and *Þrymr*'s sister. The most outstanding feature of the lay is the comicalness of the situations that mock *Freyja*'s, and especially *Þórr*'s sexuality and their closely associated reputation.

The poem starts when *Þórr* awakens and realises that someone has stolen his hammer *Mjǫllnir*. Heedless and distressed he seeks *Loki* to bring him word about the delicate situation. *Loki* borrows *Freyja*'s feather cloak with which he sets off to giant's land where he finds *Þrymr*, who promptly admits to being the thief of *Mjǫllnir*, and demands *Freyja* as his bride in exchange for the hammer. When *Þórr* hears about this condition he sets out to get *Freyja*, and wishes to take her to the giant *Þrymr*. *Freyja*, who would not dream of giving in to what is requested of her, becomes furious and adamantly rejects the god's request. At the suggestion of *Heimdallr*, however, *Þórr* disguises himself as a bride and eventually sets out to giant's land. *Loki* accompanies him as his bridesmaid. Later that evening the wedding feast starts, and when the hammer is brought out and laid into the bride's lap for consecration, *Þórr* reaches for it. He slays both *Þrymr* and his sister, and finally reacquires his hammer *Mjǫllnir*.

7.2 Justified Objections and Their Implications

Since his hammer, the symbol of virility and power, has been stolen, one finds a rather desperate *Þórr* in the initial situation of *Þrymskviða*. With the help of *Mjǫllnir*, *Þórr* keeps the giants at bay and protects the gods and their abodes from their opponents, which are

[130] von See, *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda, Band 2*, 514. *Haustlǫng* 9-13 tells of *Iðunn*'s abduction as well as the stealing of her apples, and *Sǫrla þáttr* mentions the theft of *Freyja*'s necklace *gullmen*.

traditionally the giants. When he realises that the hammer has been stolen he is seized by anger and rage but also by despair. *Þórr* is dependent on the hammer in order to sustain the god's superiority over the giants within the mythological society.[131] John McKinnell refers to *Þórr*'s anger in his article *Myth As Therapy: The Function of Þrymskviða* (2014) as an "impotent anger"[132] as his manhood is challenged by trickery. He obviously has no idea how to regain his weapon.

When *Loki* flies to *Jǫtunheimar* the giant *Þrymr* immediately admits to being in possession of the hammer and demands *Freyja* as quid pro quo: *"Ek hefi Hlórriða/ hamar um fólginn,/ átta rǫstom/ fyr jǫrð neðan;/ hann engi maðr/ aptr um heimtir,/ nema færi mér/, Freyju at kvæn."*[133] It is indeed not new that the giants lust after *Freyja*, who is the goddess embodying love, fertility and beauty.[134] However, none of the attempts to win the goddess are ever successful. In this case the giant *Þrymr* gets too close for comfort to the gods.

As soon as *Loki* returns to *Þórr* he echoes the giant's claim, and both *Þórr* and *Loki* head off *"fagra Freyju at hitta"*[135]. *Þórr*, however, does not even request *Freyja* to get dressed up and marry the giant but rather demands of her to put on a bridal dress and then start out for *Jǫtunheimar* with him: *"Bittu þik, Freyja,/ brúðar líni,/ vit skulum aka tvau/ í jǫtunheima."*[136] The manner the god displays undeniably reflects his helplessness and sexual insecurity evoked by the loss of the hammer. *Þórr*'s honour and the gods' social rank within the mythological fabric are at stake which is why he urges *Freyja* to accept her fate.[137] *Þórr* is probably assumed to be able to exert power over the female, but with the loss of the hammer he obviously lost also this power.

In contrast to both *Alvíssmál* and *Skírnismál*, the female has not only a voice at this point, as evidenced by the use of her tongue to defend herself from *Þórr*'s abstruse claim, but also is heard by the males. This active participation is indeed remarkable as a woman had no decisional power in choosing a husband but rather had to accept the choice that

[131] See chapter 3.2.
[132] John McKinnell, "Myth As Therapy: The Function of *Þrymskviða*," in *Essays on Eddic Poetry*, ed. Donata Kick and John D. Shafer (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), 203.
[133] *Þrk* 8.
[134] *Gylf* 24.
[135] *Þrk* 12.
[136] Ibid.
[137] Clunies Ross, "Reading *Þrymskviða*," 181.

was made by her male relatives: *"it was a fate she could do little to avoid, beyond using her often considerable eloquence to persuade her menfolk to fulfil her wishes."*[138]

As the poem informs us, the goddess who was helpful and friendly before (stanza 4) now becomes furious: *"Reið varð þá Freyja/ ok fnásaði,/ allr ása salr/ undir bifðisk,/ stǫkk þat it mikla/ men Brísinga:/ 'Mik veiztu verða/ vergjarnasta,/ ef ek ek með þér/ í jǫtunheima.'"*[139] *Freya*'s wrath finds expression in her snorting as well as the trembling of the hall and the falling off of her emblem, the necklace *Brísingamen*. In addition to this the female utters that she was the greatest nymphomaniac if she would even consider to marry a giant, as *"marriage to a giant represents total denial of a woman's fecundity and sexual fulfilment"*[140]. Nevertheless, *Freyja*'s reaction probably has to be read as an exaggeration to amuse the audience, and it certainly is one of the comical elements that can be found in *Þrymskviða.*

In her article *Reading Þrymskviða* (2002) Margaret Clunies Ross addresses *Freyja*'s concerns about her reputation to be nymphomaniac and she concludes that the goddess *"[…] already has that reputation as numerous other references in Norse mythological texts attest."*[141]

The poem further states that the gods are forced to discuss the situation to find a solution to regain *Þórr*'s hammer without losing *Freyja* to *Þrymr* and the other giants (stanza 14). For the *æsir* it is inconceivable to trade *Freyja* for the hammer as this would lead to the loss of the gods' supremacy over the giants.[142] For that reason *Heimdallr* suggests dressing up *Þórr*: *"Bindu vér Þór þá/ brúðar líni,/ hafi hann it mikla/ men Brísinga."*[143] He moreover adds in stanza 16 *"Látum und honum/ hrynja lukla/ ok kvenváðir/ um kné falla,/ en á brjósti/ breiða steina,/ ok hagliga/ um hǫfuð typpum."*

These words reveal another aspect of the medieval Icelandic marriage customs: bridal fashion. According to *Heimdallr* a bride usually wore not only a bridal veil (*brúðarlín*) but also jewellery (*Brísingamen*) that is here used to prove *Þórr* to be *Freyja* as it is her symbol of recognition.[144] Another important feature is the keys (*luklar*) which represented

[138] McKinnell, "Myth as a Therapy," 207.
[139] *Þrk* 13.
[140] McKinnell, "Myth as a Therapy," 204. On a related note, McKinnell also mentions *Skírnir*'s threat against *Gerðr* in *Skm* 31.
[141] Clunies Ross, "Reading *Þrymskviða*," 193. Clunies Ross lists here *Ls* 29-32 and *Hdl* 46-47 as examples.
[142] Outlined in chapter 3.2.
[143] *Þrk* 15.
[144] von See, *Kommentar zu den Lieder der Edda – Band 2*, 549.

the female's power inside the house (*innan stokks*).[145] Moreover a bride seemed to have worn a dress (*kvennváðir*) as well as a headdress (*typpum* [146]).

Since *Þórr* himself was outwitted by the giant and thus has experienced "a symbolic castration"[147], he has to straighten things out to the advantage of the *æsir* even though he is afraid of the accompanied disgrace by wearing women's clothing: *"Mik munu æsir/ argan kalla/, ef ek bindask læt/ brúðar líni."*[148] To make *Þórr*, the most masculine figure among the gods dress up like a bride, is to be understood as another comical or parodic element of the poem. As *Freyja* was in stanza 13, it is now *Þórr* who is so concerned about his masculinity and is worried about being called unmanly (*argr*).[149] There are two reasons for this: Firstly, the loss of his hammer happened while he was asleep and thus while he was in a passive state. Secondly, he is supposed to simulate being a woman which probably is the greatest thinkable humiliation for *"þrúðugur áss*"[150].

In his article *Cross-Dressing in the Poetic Edda - Mic muno Æsir argan kalla* (2012), James Frankki surveys *Þórr*'s cross-dressing and the connected parody albeit the act itself was tabooed and even penalised in medieval Iceland. He concludes that the cross-dressing as a literary motif was accepted if the intent was only to deceive and as such the last resort to maintain society's order. Moreover, Frankki proposes, the literary figure had to rehabilitate its former reputation. Clunies Ross, in turn, interprets the cross-dressing as a challenge of the prevalent social norms that were based on honour and shame. Closely linked to these norms were the well-defined gender rules whose boarders are widened due to *Þórr*'s and *Loki'*s cross-dressing.[151]

However much *Þórr* tried to avert his 'own marriage' with the giant, he has to travel to giant's land together with *Loki* as his bridesmaid. This seems to evoke contradictions as the wedding usually took place at the bride's family property. Since the hammer is buried somewhere in *Jǫtunheimar*, the gods have no other choice but to send off the bride.

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[145] Already explained in chapter 4.4; see also Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Women in Old Norse Literature*, 18.
[146] von See, *Kommentar zu den Lieder der Edda – Band 2*, 552. Von See suggests adding a missing object, i.e. *faldr* "women's headgear".
[147] Clunies Ross, "Reading *Þrymskviða*," 188.
[148] *Þrk* 17.
[149] *"The man who is argr is willing or inclined to play or interested in playing the female part in sexual relations. It is characteristic of the idea that in this sense it can only be applied to a man."*, Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, *The Unmanly Man – Concepts of Sexual Defamation in Early Northern Society* (Odense: Odense University Press, 1983), 18.
[150] *Þrk* 17.
[151] Clunies Ross, "Reading *Þrymskviða*," 181, 189.

Another oddity that is outlined here is the bride's companion who usually was the father or a brother rather than only a female bride's maid.[152] A male marriage attendant in addition to *Þórr*'s 'shameful' outward appearance may have intensified the god's humiliation as he is the *áss* who embodies strength and power, and thus is not in need of protection.

In *Jǫtunheimar*, *Þrymr* asks the other giants to prepare for the wedding feast (*"stráið bekki"*[153]) and mentions all his treasures among which only *Freyja* seems to be missing: *"fjǫlð á ek meiðma,/ fjǫlð á ek menja,/ einnar mér Freyju/ ávant þykkir."*[154] According to these lines, the goddess is clearly considered to be an object to complete the collection of valuable articles rather than a woman that deserves acknowledgement as a person and equal subject.

Following this, the poem informs about the wedding feast itself whose climax displays the consecration of the bride with the hammer. As the banns are called, beer, meat, fish, and mead are served: *"[…] ǫl fram borit./ Einn át oxa,/ átta laxa,/ krásir allar/[…] drakk Sifjar verr/sáld þrjú mjaðar."*[155] Again, *Þórr*'s behaviour is mocked as he is dressed like a woman, but obviously does not know how to act like a female (goddess): *"he is an inept drag queen, for he cannot conceal his masculine identity even under his bridal veil."*[156] That, in turn, raises *Þrymr*'s suspicions in stanza 25: *"Hvar sáttu brúðir/ bíta hvassara?/ Sáka ek brúðir/ bíta breiðara,/ né inn meira mjǫð/ mey um drekka."*, and stanza 27 when the giant tries to kiss his bride: *"Hví eru ǫndótt/ augu Freyju?/ þykki mér ór augum/* eldr *of brenna."* Both times *Loki* has to step into the breach to reason the bride's behaviour or appearance (stanza 26 and 28). The giant, however, seems to be so smitten with his *Freyja*, and confident of his success that he wants to believe those spurious excuses, and does not recognise *Þórr*.[157]

In stanza 29 *Þrymr*'s sister appears at the wedding feast and rather unceremoniously claims the bride's dowry (*brúðfé*) in exchange for her love and reception into her family:

[152] McKinnell, "Myth as Therapy," 205/206.
[153] *Þrk* 22; a similar phrase can be found in *Alv* 1 where *Alvíss* states to strew benches (*"bekki breiða"*) as a preparation of the wedding feast.
[154] *Þrk* 23.
[155] *Þrk* 24.
[156] Clunies Ross, "Reading *Þrymskviða*," 182.
[157] McKinnell, "Myth as Therapy," 206.

"Láttu þér af hǫndum/ hringa rauða,/ ef þú ǫðlask vill/ ástir mínar,/ ástir mínar,/ alla hylli."

Following this, another feature of the wedding ceremony is referred to: *Þrymr* demands the hammer be brought to consecrate his bride by placing it into her lap: *"Berið inn hamar/ brúði at vígja,/ leggið Mjǫllni/ í meyjar kné,/ vígið okkr saman/ Vára hendi."* [158]

At this point *Þórr*, disguised as *Freyja* recovers from his insecurity and reaches for his hammer. With *Mjǫllnir* in his hands he wins back his former strength. He first slays the giant *Þrymr*, and then the rest of the present giants, as well as the giant's greedy sister: *"[...] Þrym drap han fyrstan,/[...] ok ætt jǫtuns/ alla lamði"*[159] and *"Drap hann ina ǫldnu/ jǫtna systur,/ hin er brúðfjár/ of beðit hafði;/ hon skell um hlaut/ fyr skillinga,/ en hǫgg hamars/ fyr hringa fjǫlð."*[160] By doing so, *Þórr* demonstrates not only his power but also rehabilitates his damaged reputation, a requirement that granted exemption for the in other ways 'shameful' cross-dressing: *"Svá kom Óðins sonr/ endr at hamri."*[161]

7.3 Interim Conclusion

The survey of *Þrymskviða* has outlined additional elements and characteristics of the (mythological) marriage. In this Eddic poem the emphasis is on the wedding ceremony (*brullaup*) itself and its related peculiarities. *Mundr* and *festar*, however, go unheeded as the events are based on the stealing of the hammer *Mjǫllnir* which instead leads to an arranged marriage ceremony. *Þrymskviða* provides information about the bridal fashion including a veil, jewellery, and a headdress as well as the served food which included beef, fish, mead and beer. Moreover the consecration of the bride is mentioned, a consecration in which the hammer *Mjǫllnir* is used. But yet, a few inconsistencies can be observed: As already stated, there is no *mundr* paid by the future husband. Instead, the bride's dowry is outright claimed by the sister-in-law. Furthermore, the ceremony does not take place at the bride's family abode but in *Jǫtunheimar* where *Þrymr* lives. A last

[158] *Þrk* 30.
[159] *Þrk* 31.
[160] *Þrk* 32.
[161] *Þrk* 33.

outstanding oddness is that the bride is not accompanied by a male marriage guardian but only by her bridesmaid.

These discrepancies, certainly, are based on the fact that the *æsir* send *Þórr* instead of *Freyja* to 'marry' *Þrymr*. In comparison to *Gerðr* in *Skírnismál* and *Þrúðr* in *Alvíssmál*, *Freyja* has an actual choice and gets the chance to use her voice to express her opposition against marrying a giant in order to regain *Þórr*'s hammer. *Freyja*, hence, is in the position to choose her husband or at least to reject a decision someone else made for her, a position that nevertheless is grounded on the negative reciprocity to hold the giants at bay and maintain the god's supremacy within the mythological society.

8. Conclusion and Further Perspectives

The wish to marry, in accordance with the mythological poems *Skírnismál*, *Alvíssmál* and *Þrymskviða*, was not always accompanied by the consent of both parties, the bride and her family on one side, and the potential husband on the other. Instead, concerns such as maintaining an existing hierarchy or supremacy of one social group or character over the other was of greater importance than someone's personal opinions, desires or feelings.

In the course of this, three different kinds of influence can be observed: First and foremost, the male subjecting the female. Secondly the *æsir* as head of the social hierarchy within the mythological world and their attempts to ensure this position. And finally, the head of the family usually represented by the father and his guardianship of his daughter.

In *Þrymskviða* it is *Þórr* who pressures *Freyja* to accommodate him by smoothing away difficulties that come along with the loss of his hammer. *Þórr* seems persuaded to be in a position to dispose of the goddess in marriage with the giant *Þrymr*. Perturbed by the fear of losing his reputation and power *Þórr* demands the unthinkable from *Freyja*: to agree to a marriage with a giant. The close analysis of *Skírnismál* also shows that it is the male that overcomes the female: *Skírnir* threatens the giantess *Gerðr* until she accepts her fate and realises that a female has to comply once a man utters a demand. In *Alvíssmál*, again, the female *Þrúðr* seems to have no say in choosing her husband, and thus, she is completely at her father, a male's, mercy.

The dominance of the gods finds expression in *Alvíssmál* since *Þórr* denies the dwarf *Alvíss* his request to marry his daughter. A marriage between the dwarf *Alvíss* and the *ásynja Þrúðr* was an arrangement that endangered the *æsir*'s primacy position, and consequently, this was to be averted. A similar situation is reflected in *Skírnismál*. The *vanr Freyr* falls in love with the giantess *Gerðr* and his servant *Skírnir* sets off to persuade the female, who seems to have no interest in the god. *Skírnir* pulls out all the stops to bend *Gerðr*'s will and to give assurance to her meeting with *Freyr*.

The father's guardianship is described in *Skírnismál* and *Alvíssmál*. *Skírnismál* informs us about *Gymir*'s safety precautions to protect *Gerðr* from strangers. Her dwelling place is surrounded by fences and dogs that are meant to scare away arriving strangers. In *Alvíssmál*, *Þórr* tells *Alvíss* in no uncertain terms that the decisional power

over his daughter *Þrúðr* resides in him. Without *Þórr*'s approval no wooer can take *Þrúðr* home.

The hierarchical thinking that is expressed in the mythological poems is also reflected in the laws of medieval Iceland. *Grágás* informs that a couple had to be *jafnræði* to marry and that in general the father (or brother) of a woman was her guardian. Only with the guardian's permission could a wedding take place. Moreover, the examples have shown that marriages were important alliances to preserve the social order and could decide the future status of a family. Therefore, matrimony was employed to avoid or settle disagreements or feuds between families and could contribute to negotiating peace.

In these premises, the interests of the family were of greater value than personal choice or romantic feelings, which were rarely taken into account. Matrimony was an important tool, and as part of it the woman was employed like a means to an end. According to both mythological and legal sources the woman had no say in the matter while the father or the future husband could cancel a proposed wedding. Moreover, the father's consent was imperative.

The behaviour patterns that are associated with entering into the bond of marriage are also shaped by the above mentioned supremacy of the male over the female. In that regard it seems that the male stops at nothing to win a female or protect her from a potentially "unsuitable" husband. In *Þrymskviða*, this is expressed in the form of trickery and stealing which ultimately paves the way for the marriage of *Þrymr* and *Freyja*. In the same poem, deception (*Þórr*'s cross-dressing) and violence (*Þórr*'s smashing of the giant and his family) are described actions intended to prevent this alliance. *Skírnismál*, again, exhibits courtship featured by wooing gifts (*Iðunn*'s apples and the golden ring *Draupnir*) and the use of threats of a violent nature against *Gerðr*, her family and her desires. *Skírnir* does not flinch from applying curses against the female and even disarms the giantess by silencing her. A similar situation is reflected in *Alvíssmál* since *Þrúðr* is completely voiceless while father and future spouse negotiate her fate.

According to these examples women had to be obedient, as this was an expected behaviour on behalf of the female. A man could bend a woman to his will, and thereby, he could employ all available funds since everything seemed to be allowed or at least tolerated. At the same time it is safe to say that the male part of the (mythological) society was aware of the females' wishes, hopes, and fears. To advance towards these desires,

women could only use their voices. As soon as a male figure felt threatened by a woman's words, he would disarm her by silencing her (i.e., in *Skírnismál*). Or, to make sure that such a situation would not emerge, the female simply would not get a chance to speak at all (i.e., *Alvíssmál*) since her opinion is not of any significance within the patriarchal Old Norse system.

However, the myths cover more than only the orders of priorities and behaviour patterns. The main conditions *mundr*, *festar* and *brullaup*, which had to be fulfilled for a legal marriage to take place, are also contained in the poems. *Þrymskviða* provides information about the *brullaup* ("wedding feast") at *Þrymr*'s dwelling place. The food which was served as well as the bridal fashion are both described, and the consecration of the bride is also mentioned. Since the wedding is triggered by the theft of the hammer, the starting situation for a wedding is an unorthodox one, and consequently, contradictions to the regular course of events can be registered. The *mundr* ("bride's wealth") undeniably occurs in *Skírnismál* in the form of the wooing gifts, and even *festar* ("betrothals") are found when *Gerðr* finally agrees to meet *Freyr*.

Grágás as a conglomeration of laws from the Icelandic Free State period (930-1262/64) is not a unified body of law. Moreover it is not to assume that all laws and regulations contained therein were in use at all, or even valid at the same time. In fact the preserved laws presumably originated in different times. In that regard both *Grágás* and the *Poetic Edda* resemble one another: the laws as well as the myths were recorded after Christianity arrived in Iceland but are believed to contain and reflect pre-Christian traditions that were handed down orally for a long time, and thus most probably underwent a multitude of changes.

What is more astonishing is that in terms of matrimony so many parallels can be drawn to make realistic claims about the features of the subsequent medieval Icelandic society. And yet, it seems impossible to make any assumptions as to which of these patterns may derive from a pre-Christian time and which ones from a later Christian time. Myths had to adapt to new circumstances to maintain their significance to society and to be remembered. Otherwise mythological narratives dwindled away. Laws that were not improved or adjusted to the given conditions underwent the same adaptive process or were also lost or dismissed over time.

The above conducted analysis may allow us to draw conclusions about the investigated texts and the time of their recording. Oral tradition, the change of religion, and also, writing caused many changes and adaptations over a long period of time. Therefore, it is questionable if general valid statements for the medieval Icelandic society can be made.

These reflections on mythological narratives lead us to a question that was raised at the onset of this thesis: Why would Christian scribes retell stories about gods and other supernatural beings that contradicted their own ideology and faith?

In fact, the gods, their opponents and their social order constituted an important part of Iceland's traditional culture and were firmly established in the minds of the people. After the conversion to Christianity, the Old Norse myths were considered as a medium to demonstrate the limitation of the pre-Christian gods' power. This is notably expressed in their decisions and deeds which are not always of an anticipatory or wise nature. At the same time the myths were excellent vehicles to thematise social concerns as well as cultural apprehensions such as the maintaining of social hierarchies and the superiority of the male over the female (as shown). Another explanation for the multitude of written accounts dealing with the pre-Christian past could be Iceland's late conversion, as well as the missing royal influence in this process. The scribes' personal interest in their country's past, however, could also have led to the recording of stories about the gods.[162]

Whatever inspired the Christian scribes to compile these narratives, the arrival of Christianity, certainly, did not mark their ending. Instead, the stories were adapted to the new normative structures, and they may have been used to reveal the shortcomings of the pre-Christian deities.[163]

It is indeed conceivable to extend the scope of these considerations. To start with, further Eddic poems could be considered to create a more comprehensive picture of matrimony and associated behaviour patterns within the *Poetic Edda*. In *Vafþrúðnismál,* for instance, *Óðinn* asks his wife for advice about visiting the giant *Vafþúðnir*. Although *Frigg* discourages him from meeting the giant, *Óðinn* sets off to his abode. Here the relation between wife and husband could be more closely examined. The same applies to

[162] Paul Acker, "Introduction," xii.
[163] This, as Margaret Clunies Ross argues, finds expression especially in the comical elements of the Eddic poem *Þrymskviða*, but also in further narratives. Clunies Ross, "Reading *Þrymskviða*," 183/184.

Lokasenna since here *Loki* incriminates the goddesses and gods present, and not all of them come to their spouse's defence. Moreover, examples from *Snorra Edda* could be regarded, as well as examples from the genre of the Icelandic saga.

All three female characters *Þrúðr*, *Gerðr* and even *Freyja* are trapped in the social fabrics of the Old Norse mythological world that is controlled by the male gods. None of them have an actual say in the choice of their husbands. Especially in *Skírnismál* it is demonstrated that *Gerðr* has to give in and accept her fate. But what was the value of a life, already characterised by heteronomy, if one could not even maintain one's personal hopes and desires? *Gerðr* loses her supposed independence in the reader's eyes, but keeps her dignity, a virtue of much greater importance.

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List of Abbreviations

Alv	*Alvíssmál*
Gg	*Grágás*
Gylf	*Gylfaginning*
Hdl	*Hyndluljóð*
Ls	*Lokasenna*
Skm	*Skírnismál*
Skskm	*Skáldskaparmál*
Þrk	*Þrymskviða*